OAP Community Relations Pilot Review Report

Background

In March, 2000, Secretary Richardson asked the Openness Advisory Panel (OAP) of the Secretary of Energy Advisory Board to undertake an effort to review and assess DOE's relationships with the communities surrounding its laboratories and facilities, and to provide an independent assessment of how DOE is perceived as a neighbor, what it is doing well, what it could do better.

As a first step in that effort, the Panel decided to conduct a pilot review to test the process at several sites and provide a basis of experience for developing a more extensive review process. Three sites were selected for this pilot review: The sites were selected as representative of DOE's varied missions:

-    Lawrence Berkeley National Laboratory, a multi-purpose science laboratory
-    Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory, an active defense laboratory
-    The Fernald Plant, a former defense site that is now being cleaned up and shut down, and widely recognized an example of particularly good community relations.

The review consisted of two-day visits involving meetings with individuals or small groups representing a cross section of interests and views. The investigators met with:

- State and local regulatory authorities
- Elected officials
- Public service providers (e.g. police and fire officials)
- Business leaders and union leaders
- Educators
- Public interest groups
- DOE or site advisory boards
- contractors
- DOE site and operations personnel

The visits were conducted by a subteam of four OAP members.[1] A total of over 100 individuals at the three sites were interviewed during the course of the pilot review.

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[1] Herbert Brown (Chairman), Margret Carde, Thomas Cotton, and Eric Willis

FINDINGS

The following tentative conclusions are based on the observations of the OAP review team that visited the three pilot sites and subsequent discussions with other OAP members.

These findings also draw on other reports by SEAB panels that address different aspects of DOE's relations with outside parties. The first is the report of the SEAB Task Force on Radioactive Waste Management. Established in 1991 at the request of Secretary James D. Watkins, this intensive 27-month study examined the critical issues of ensuring public trust and confidence in the Department's radioactive waste management programs, and developed recommendations intended to be more broadly applicable within the Department. [2] Its report, *Earning Public Trust and Confidence: Requisites for Managing Radioactive Waste*, was issued in November 1993. [3] (The task force will be referred to as the Trust and Confidence Task Force herein to ensure clear association with this report.) Since radioactive waste management activities affect many if not most of the communities that are neighbors to DOE facilities, they have particular relevance to this review of community relations activities and issues.

The second report is *Responsible Openness: An Imperative for the Department of Energy*, issued by the Openness Advisory Panel of the SEAB in August 1997. [4] In this report, the Openness Advisory Panel took an expansive view of openness:

> "We see 'openness' as a broad concept that covers much more than declassification. Providing the public with access to information is equally important. And beyond accessibility of information, openness involves a way of doing business in which stakeholders and other interested parties are invited to participate, rather than be kept at arm's length." [5]

This report addressed the broader aspects of openness: improving the classifications system, achieving greater accessibility to documents and information, and changing the culture of the Department. Since the openness of the Department's relations with its neighboring communities is a crucial aspect of this broad concept of openness, a number of the findings and recommendations of this earlier report are applicable to the specific issue of improving community relations.

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[2] The panel undertook an extensive effort extending over a period of 27 months. In a series of eight meetings throughout the country, the panel heard formal presentations from nearly 100 representatives of state and local governments, non-governmental organizations, and senior DOE Headquarters and Field Office managers. The group also commissioned a variety of studies from independent experts, contracted with the National Academy of Sciences and the National Academy of Public Administration to hold workshops on designing and leading trust-evoking organizations, and carried out one survey of parties affected by the Department's radioactive waste management activities and a second one of DOE employees and contractors.

[3] The report is available on the SEAB Web page at http://www.hr.doe.gov/seab/

[4] *Responsible Openness: An Imperative for the Department of Energy*, Openness Advisory Panel, Secretary of Energy Advisory Board, U.S. Department of Energy, Washington, D.C., August 25, 1997. The report is available on the SEAB Web page at http://www.hr.doe.gov/seab/

[5] *Responsible Openness*, p. 5.

1. Good community relations can help DOE facilities achieve their missions

The crucial first step in improving community relations is for DOE and contractor personnel to understand that the state of their facility's relations with its neighbors can affect their ability to carry out their jobs successfully.[6] This point was emphasized to us by a DOE public affairs official with experience at both ends of the spectrum of community relations. The central importance of public trust – a key element of good relations with both the local community and the broader public – was also stressed by both earlier SEAB panel reports that addressed the Department's relations with the outside world (see box).

> "Public trust and confidence is not a luxury. DOE not only has an obligation to earn it, but it also has a compelling need to do so."
> *Trust and Confidence* Report, p.20.
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> "*DOE needs to have the public trust if it is to accomplish its missions....*
> The Secretary should place a high priority on enhancing and institutionalizing openness throughout DOE and its contractor community. The public trust that openness can nurture is an essential precondition for success in the Department's activities." *Responsible Openness*, pp.2-3

What kind of involvement DOE should have with its neighbors begs the question: who are the neighbors? The old definition of neighbor as someone who lives and works near the DOE site may no longer work. Today, "neighbors" may be described as those interested in or affected by DOE's presence, whether by traffic congestion, health and safety concerns, as a potential employer, through interaction with employees that work at DOE sites, the impact of the site on land use questions, and a variety of other issues.

Old definitions of "neighbor" are rapidly transforming. For example, DOE facilities find themselves in an increasingly dynamic environment. Change has many dimensions: local development and growth patterns, economic changes both residential and industrial, social and political shifts of opinion, and demographic changes both within the facilities themselves and in the surrounding communities. No longer can a DOE facility assume that it is the only attractive "high tech" business in town. The influx of other companies means growing competition for both technical and support personnel, as well as for the interest and support of the local community. It is not practical to take the community's appreciation for the existence of the facility for granted.

Changing residential a demographic patterns are complicating the task of relating to the surrounding community. As we saw at every site we visited, employees are the first line,

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[6] One DOE official pointed out that the first step is to convince DOE and contractor personnel that community relations is a problem that affects them; then show them what they can do about it.

and the most effective, ambassadors in a community. However, the concept of a site's "community" is expanding as workers, for economic reasons, must live farther and farther away.[7] While the relationship to the local host community remains of central importance, a declining percentage of site workers residing in that community can lessen the beneficial influence of workers as "ambassadors." At the same time, there may be a need to extend the geographic scope of a site's community relations efforts to encompass new dormitory communities in which more and more workers reside. Interviews with representatives of some of these more remote communities indicated genuine interest in having a closer relationship with the neighboring DOE facility.

Another important change is the demographic "graying" that is occurring at some (many) DOE facilities. As the average age of the employees increases, there are fewer families with school age children, and therefore lesser incentives to the older DOE employees for community involvement, particularly in schools. Facilities need to encourage the older generation of workers to make their skills available as valuable resources for the community, and to support and recognize community efforts.

Good relations with surrounding communities are desirable if for no other reason than that public facilities conducting the public's business should not be bad neighbors. At a more pragmatic level bad community relations limit a facility's ability to carry out its missions. At the simplest level, a state of friction caused by the surrounding community's dissatisfaction can divert management attention and resources away from program missions. If the relationship is characterized by deep distrust, it can lead to, or exacerbate, active opposition to those missions. As the Trust and Confidence Task Force observed, "The lack of public trust and confidence is not only being recognized by stakeholders as an obstacle to programmatic progress, but it is also being used increasingly as a reason for opposing initiatives that are important to programmatic progress."[8]

Cases of activities causing conflict with the community should be carefully scrutinized and not allowed to fester, since problems in one area can adversely affect the overall relationship. As one environmental activist observed with respect to the relations of the nearby DOE facility with his community, "There have been good points, but the bad ones stick in your mind."

Where there is continuing and vocal political opposition to a particular activity at a site, it is important to determine whether the benefits of retaining the activity outweigh those of terminating it in the interests of eliminating the disproportionate amount of management time and resources devoted to it. In cases in which the activity is part of the site's mandated mission, the site might have little discretion to eliminate the activity. However, it might have some ability to modify it in ways that address local concerns while still achieving fundamental objectives. As one DOE manager observed, it might sometimes be necessary to modify the mission in order to achieve enough consensus to allow progress.

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[7] We were informed by a realtor that the average price of a 1000 square foot two bedroom, one bath house in Berkeley, host to the Lawrence Berkeley Laboratory, is about $500,000.
[8] *Trust and Confidence* Report, p.37

Furthermore, as DOE facilities increasingly seek to expand their activities beyond their core missions, by providing services to other government agencies and even the private sector, the acceptability of particularly discretionary activities to their host communities deserves careful consideration. In one instance of a controversial activity observed during the pilot study, members of the community suggested that simply placing the option of terminating the activity on the table for discussion might reduce the conflict and improve the level of trust. DOE should develop protocols for evaluating the level of public opposition to a project, when to weigh the importance of the project in relation to the public opposition, and how to include the concerned public in the review process. The protocols should encourage processes for interaction with the community that assure early attention to community concerns, even if raised by only a few members of the public.

2.   Each site must tailor community relations programs to its own circumstances

Every site has unique features that must be taken into account in developing an appropriate community relations program. Every community has its own personality, and the relationship between the site and the community has a history that must be taken into account when addressing future site plans.

A particularly important difference concerns the nature of the activities at the site. A site such as Fernald, which is engaged solely in cleaning up and shutting down, faces very different challenges from a site such as Livermore, which is still actively engaged in defense nuclear activities. In Fernald, there is widespread agreement about the mission of the site. We heard from various parties that the key point in turnaround with the community was the decision to shut down the activities that were the source of radioactive and hazardous emissions.- From that point on, a cooperative relationship to achieve the shared objective of environmental health and safety was possible. At sites where there are ongoing activities that have potentially adverse impacts on the community, or that are associated with controversial policy issues, the scope of shared interests is smaller and the potential for conflicts greater.

Despite these differences, there are common denominators of principle and practice that should apply across all sites.[9] However, the means and styles of implementation may be different to suit particular circumstances. Local DOE community relations officials with considerable successful experience cautioned against pushing specific techniques onto all the sites from the top. One size does not fit all. Instead, it is better to set a performance goal (improve relations with the community) and let each site figure out how best to achieve it. DOE officials at several sites pointed to the Department's successful Integrated Safety Management (ISM) initiative, aimed at making safety management an integral part of work, as a good example of a non-prescriptive approach.

In seeking methods to improve community relations in their particular circumstances, sites should seek to learn from the successful experiences of other DOE sites and the

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[9] One businessman with considerable success at community relations warned, "'We're different' is an excuse for not doing anything."

private sector. DOE Headquarters could play a useful role in promoting a systematic lessons-learned effort to identify and assess the causes of both successes and failures and to disseminate the lessons throughout the complex.[10]

3.   The legacy of distrust of DOE must be addressed.

DOE and the site contractor must understand that they are operating in a climate of public distrust created by the behavior of the AEC and its successors over many years. This point was made in a variety of ways by many people in each of the communities that were visited. As one senior site manager put it, "The problem we face is that people don't believe anything DOE says." On the same point, a local emergency response person said, "Once you've lied to me, it's hard to trust you. It took a long time for me to believe anything from DOE." This legacy of distrust places extra burdens on DOE and contractor personnel who bear no responsibility for the actions that created the distrust, but who must nonetheless deal with it. As the Trust and Confidence Task Force observed, this legacy of distrust could require the adoption of measures that would not otherwise be necessary.[11]

One measure that has proved to be helpful is the use of independent expert review and analysis to help defuse controversial technical issues. At several sites, various parties (including regulators) said that the independent technical work produced by consultants for stakeholder groups was of excellent quality and very useful. The Department should encourage the use of such independent technical reviews, and should ensure that the independent reviewers, who can be difficult to find, are provided the timely, comprehensive information they need to conduct an effective review.[12]

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[10] The Trust and Confidence task force recommended that DOE "Support and develop mechanisms to learn from innovations by Field Offices that have increased public trust and confidence." *Trust and Confidence Report,* p. 54

[11] "If DOE is to restore public trust and confidence, it will have to take steps that might be considered unnecessary for an organization that has maintained public trust and confidence over long periods of time." *Trust and Confidence Report*, p. 36.

[12] At one site a candidate independent technical reviewer withdrew from consideration in part because DOE appeared to be uncooperative in providing timely data. At another site, independent reviewers were refused requests to tour the site or meet with key personnel.

> "The many decades of secrecy that have surrounded the activities of the Department of Energy have served to create suspicion of the Department and its activities. These suspicions, reinforced by ongoing lapses in providing complete and timely information, damage relations between the Department and its contractors and the communities in which they must operation. These suspicions also erode confidence in the Department by the public and its elected representatives, undermining the Department's capacity to accomplish its missions. As a result, the Secretary should place a high priority on enhancing and institutionalizing openness throughout DOE and its contractor community. The public trust that openness can nurture is an essential precondition for success in the Department's activities." *Responsible Openness: An Imperative for the Department of Energy*, Openness Advisory Panel, Secretary of Energy Advisory Board, U.S. Department of Energy, Washington, D.C., August 25, 1997, *p*. ix.
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> "The legacy of distrust created by the Department's history and culture will continue for a long time to color public reaction to its radioactive waste management efforts. Only a sustained commitment by successive Secretaries of Energy can overcome it." Trust and Confidence, 36.

It is also important to be responsive to all elements in the community, and to avoid the temptation to marginalize those who are critical and distrustful. Critics and opponents should be brought to the table as part of the community. They should not be isolated from contact with contractor and DOE decisionmakers. Other members in the community might disagree with their ultimate objectives, but nonetheless feel their concerns should be taken seriously and answered respectfully and responsively. At one site, members of the community said that they look to the activists to raise issues, and expect the site to answer the questions they raise. When an activist group proposes to hire its own, legitimate auditor, DOE should cooperate fully to provide the auditor with data, site tours, interviews, and past DOE reports so that the independent auditor's report is informed by DOE's expertise.

Establishment of advisory groups should be considered as a means of enhancing regular two-way communication. The Trust and Confidence Task Force recommended that DOE commit itself to "Early and continuous involvement of state and/or local advisory groups ...on which a broad range of stakeholders ... are represented. That involvement would be characterized by frequent contact, complete candor, rapid and full response to questions, implementation of at least some suggestions, and assistance in increasing the technical and oversight skills of the community."[13]   It is important, however, that community advisory groups not be seen as creatures of the DOE or facility management. Advisory groups need flexibility to address various situations as they arise. The scope of an advisory group's review should not be arbitrarily limited.

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[13] *Trust and Confidence* Report, Executive Summary.

In seeking the trust of the community, DOE and contractor management must learn to trust the community in return. As one successful DOE community relations official observed, two-way trust is needed. While this might appear risky to those accustomed to a less open way of conducting business, it can lead to remarkably helpful results. In Fernald, DOE along with its regulators (the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency and the Ohio Environmental Protection Agency) created a citizen's task force to make recommendations on central issues posed by the remediation of the Fernald Environmental Management Project, including the target cleanup levels and the final disposition of the radioactive wastes from the site. Instead of recommending a "not in my backyard" approach involving cleanup to background levels and removal of all waste from the site, the task force took a broad view, considering a wide range of issues including feasibility, cost, and safety and equity issues raised by moving waste from their site for disposal somewhere else. As a result, the task force accepted cleanup to the EPA maximum contaminant levels, and permanent disposition of all but the most radioactive portion of the waste onsite.[14] Because the task force members were seen by the community as representative of and responsible to the community, their recommendation was accepted by the community as a whole.

4. Information must be provided fully, openly, and proactively

In our previous report, the Openness Panel pointed out that providing the public with access to information is a central part of openness. The validity of this conclusion was verified by discussions with members of the communities surrounding all three sites visited during this pilot study.

DOE and contractor personnel should actively provide information to the community about what the site does -- not only about the activities that might be of concern to the public but also about the benefits its activities provide to the community and the broader society. Lack of knowledge and familiarity breeds not only indifference, but also mistrust and fear.

Simply providing access to the facility can go a long way toward reducing the air of mystery that has surrounded DOE facilities in the past. Community Open Houses appear to be an effective and appreciated way to increase public familiarity with the activities of the facility.

It is also important to take the initiative in making information available, rather than to dole it out when there is an obvious need or legal requirement. One local business leader observed: "It's what they don't say that stirs the pot. Lay it out there in terms laymen can understand."

The need to make information understandable to the intended recipients was a common theme raised by a variety of community members during the site visits. Two levels of

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[14] Fernald Citizens Task Force, *Recommendations on Remediation Levels, Waste Disposition, Priorities, and Future Use*, July 1995.

information are necessary: details and hard data for opinion-setters, and clear, readable, concise information for the general public.

It is particularly important to be forthcoming in providing information in cases in which the information might be damaging or where the situation is changing rapidly. One senior manager put it this way : "If you have bad news, it doesn't get better with time." In the case of rapidly changing news, frequent updates and interaction with community members are essential, first, to show that DOE is addressing the problems of concern and second, to utilize public questions as a way to help identify areas that DOE may need to address more fully. As a local emergency response provider said that the willingness of the site contractor to share information was key to establishing trust. "Just tell us the truth; people can handle it."

A class of information that must be made freely available is that concerning public health, safety, and the environment. In general such information is not classified, although substantial effort might be required to find the documents containing the information and in some cases those documents will have to be reviewed and redacted because they also contain information that is classified.[15] Speaking of the importance of making information publicly available, the Trust and Confidence Task Force recommended that DOE should "disseminate without exception information about past practices that may raise questions about potential health, safety, and environmental risks." (See box)

Failure to provide full and complete information when asked breeds distrust, and not only among those who were seeking the information. We heard of several cases in which requests for data and answers to specific questions from particular groups in a community were not provided in a timely way. These occurrences were pointed out not only by the requesters, but also by other members of the community who clearly thought that the failure to respond indicated arrogance, the desire to cover up damaging information, or just plain incompetence.

Communication needs to be timely and ongoing, not simply responsive to problems. Officials should not wait for a final evaluation of a crisis or final decision on a proposal before communicating with the community. At one site, a businessman said that when he told a colleague he was coming to discuss community relations at the DOE facility, the colleague responded "They must have a problem." A local official dealing with hazardous materials called for a free and ongoing exchange of information that is not reactive and that is not necessarily solicited. "I am a public official in charge of assuring community health and safety. If I'm in the dark," he said, "the community has a real problem."

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[15] "Virtually all information bearing on environment, health, and safety is now unclassified. But, the simple fact that the information is unclassified does not necessarily mean that it is accessible. Unclassified information that is buried in a file is effectively unavailable to the public (or the Department)." *Responsible Openness*, pp. 5-6.

The minimum legal requirements concerning the amount and timing of information to be provided should be exceeded whenever necessary to meet community needs. One DOE community relations official pointed out that the involvement processes required by law come too late to allow meaningful public/DOE dialogue. There should be communication about problems and issues from the beginning. A variety of communication methods is desirable to reach all segments of the community population. In one instance, DOE and contractors used e-mail to provide timely and appreciated "heads-up" notices to members of the community to alert them to developing issues.

To provide information fully and rapidly, the Department should:

- Identify and employ the information channels actually used by stakeholders.
- Disseminate without exception information about past practices that may raise questions about potential health, safety, and environmental risks.
- Invoke the pre-decisional exemption in the Freedom of Information Act only under exceptional circumstances, which are candidly explained.
- Release, on request, any DOE-generated material that has been shared, even informally, with any other non-governmental organization. Precautions should, of course, be take to protect legitimate proprietary information.

Trust and Confidence Report, p. 50

Communication should also be two-way. Good community relations involves listening to the concerns of the community, not simply "getting the message out." One DOE manager told us: "The most important thing we can do is listen to the public and be honest with them. We must give them the good and the bad news, and follow through on commitments."

The idea of two-way communications applies in particular to the way in which the facility approaches the community with respect to plans for future activities. At several sites, various members of the community suggested that the facility management should not go out to public meetings with proposals to sell, but rather with a blank sheet of paper and a willingness to talk about issues and solutions.

To ensure clear and timely two-way communication, there should be an established and well-recognized mechanism through which the public has direct access to top contractor and DOE officials at the site. A standing advisory panel can serve this function, but more informal practices (such as regular one-on-one meetings) can also work.

Special care will have to be taken to keep the culture of secrecy that has historically governed defense-related work from being an obstacle to openness in communications and in community relations in general. At one site, a businessman noted that progress had

been made in relations with the DOE facility in past years, but that the security issues that have arisen in the last several years have stopped things. **While preservation and enhancement of security for critical nuclear secrets is extremely important, the Department must recognize that a workable balance must be struck with openness. In its previous report, the Openness Advisory Panel observed that greater openness is required for the success of the Department's missions not only for the credibility and trust that it engenders, but also because the ability to recruit and retain a staff of the highly skilled scientific and technical professions needed to implement its defense missions, especially the Science Based Stockpile Stewardship program, might depend upon it.** As the report observed, "a life 'behind the fence' may not seem as desirable to new recruits as it may have been during the Cold War."[16] In addition, the productivity of the laboratories will probably entail a greater mix of classified and unclassified research than in the past. Achieving a balance between security and openness will enhance the likelihood of productive advances in both areas.[17]

5. *Person-to-person contact is crucial for good community relations*

It is individuals that people trust, not the institution, particularly in light of the legacy of distrust of DOE. This point was made abundantly clear by community members at all of the sites visited. For this reason, successful community relations requires building positive personal relationships with key individuals and organizations.[18] One DOE public affairs official observed that there is so much competition for public attention in the proliferation of mass media that mass communications is an ineffective way to persuade the public. Instead, he stated, building personal relationships with opinion leaders is "the only way I know of to build trust."

Both DOE and the site contractor must have the right people in the community relations jobs; the public must be comfortable with them and have access to them. These people must also have respect within DOE and hold high enough positions to have authority to access top management and implement policies. Continuity of personnel appears to be particularly important in building trusting personal relationships.

In addition to a formal community relations or public affairs staff, every site has employees at all levels throughout the organization who are excellent ambassadors, who thrive on outreach and involvement. At each site the review group heard praise for the work of such individuals.[19]

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[16] *Responsible Openness*, p.2.

[17] *Responsible Openness*, p. 3

[18] The importance of building relationships in the host community is recognized in the private sector. "At the heart of the neighbor of choice strategy is relationship building. The intention is to position the company favorably into the community by developing positive and sustainable relationships with key individuals and organizations.....The company has to be viewed as an asset, not a liability, in the community. And it has to use relationship building as a means for developing a legacy of trust in the community. When a crisis occurs, consequently, the company's explanations will be heard fairly." Burke, op. cit., p. 3.

[19] At one site, the individual who was mentioned most frequently as being an outstanding representative of the site to the community was not a member of the community relations or public affairs organizations.

An important task of the community relations office is to facilitate and support productive contacts between employees and the community, and to provide a visible point of contact. The burden of finding employees willing to work with the community should not be placed entirely on the community. One businessman observed, "If we want to work with [the neighboring facility] we have to seek out an empathetic person. We wouldn't think of going to an office of community relations. Things happen because individuals put in time and effort." The community needs to see that the site gives such individuals clear, visible institutional support and recognition, including a commitment to continuity if the individuals leave.[20]

A particularly interesting and successful model is the "Fernald Envoy Program," established in 1994 to promote one-on-one communication between Fernald personnel and representatives of local community groups interested in site activities. Envoys, who are both DOE and site contractor employees, build close relationships with community groups by providing them with detailed information, listening to their questions, concerns, and suggestions, and providing this feedback to those involved in making decisions concerning Fernald cleanup activities. Envoys have direct access to top management. They are empowered to give information to the public – without having to go up and down the chains of command in the site contractor and DOE organizations; if they cannot answer a question from their own knowledge, they can get the needed information from experts at the site. A DOE community relations official stated that the key to success at Fernald was relinquishing control of stakeholder relations, so that it took place all levels – not just the top of the organization.

At some sites the site and community have set up citizen advisory boards which meet to discuss areas of concern in the community and to make recommendations to DOE and its contractor. These boards are effective if they are perceived as independent (not boosters of DOE) and when they have some freedom in defining the scope of their investigation.

6. Attitudes towards community relations are important to success

DOE and the contractor must approach community relations with the understanding that the site is a part of the local community, not a federal enclave on foreign territory. This is obviously the case at those sites where the primary or sole focus of activities now is management and mitigation of the health, safety, and environmental impacts of past activities on the surrounding community. But it is also true at the sites with a continuing active defense mission. With the end of the Cold War, and the growth of non-classified research activities even at defense sites, there is no reason to believe that the degree of isolation that might have worked in the past will continue to serve a site well in the future.

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[20] At the same site, discussing the same person, a community member noted that if this person could not help and had to refer an issue to another part of the lab having the appropriate expertise, the result was that "things fall apart – there is no interest or understanding." The perception was that the help came from the individual, not from the facility.

Both DOE and contractor management must understand clearly that they are engaged in the public's business and therefore are accountable to the public, including in particular that part of the public in whose neighborhood they work. Facility management must be willing to consider the impacts of their choices on the state of relations with the surrounding community, and to take those impacts into account in making decisions.[21]

Building good community relations requires people with the right attitude and mindset; they must not have a "fortress mentality" and must scrupulously avoid "demonizing" any opposition or being perceived as arrogant. It is important to treat all groups with respect. All members of the public, no matter what their views, have a right to know how the site affects their interests, and have the right to define those interests in the first place. Moreover, the so-called fringe opinions may be harbingers of mainstream opinion to come. DOE would do well to listen when these issues first arise so that DOE can deal with dynamic changes in matters that could well affect its community relationships.

Institutionalizing attitudes that are conducive to good community relations will likely require the change of culture called for in earlier studies (see box). [22]

Changing the Culture. ...[T]he 50 years of secrecy inherent in protecting the development of nuclear weapons inevitably produced a 'culture' – a system of beliefs and ways of doing business—that persists among the Department's employees and its contractors. Orders and regulations, however well intended to rectify defects in the system, will fall short of their intended purpose if they are counter to the prevailing mindset of this entrenched culture. It might be expected that this concern would apply only to the nuclear weapons complex, but in fact the non-defense activities of the Department were influenced by the Department's practices in the defense arena and have assumed many of its characteristics.

Until cultural change is seen by all to be in the self interest of the Department's and its contractors' employees, lasting and fundamental changes in the way DOE does business will be difficult to achieve, and the advances of the last few years will be transitory achievements."
Responsible Openness, p. 6.

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[21] On this point, the Trust and Confidence Task Force recommended a series of measures "To ensure that the public trust and confidence implications of critical Departmental activities have been properly identified and weighed.." *Trust and Confidence* Report, p. 54. The same point is recognized in the private sector "The only way that the neighbor of choice strategy will become corporate wide is to make it part of the company culture. Before a business decision is made managers need to consider: *What are the community implications of this decision?*" . Burke, op. cit., p. 7.

[22] The first independent review of the Department's openness efforts called for steps to change the culture of secrecy that inhibited openness. National Research Council, *A Review of the Department of Energy Classification Policy and Practice*, National Academy Press: Washington, D.C., 1995, p. 83.

7. Top management must be accountable for good community relations

Management must be committed to successful community relations. They must strongly support community relations efforts throughout their organizations. Furthermore, those efforts cannot be left to community relations personnel; top level management, beginning with the facility director and the DOE operations office manager, must themselves be actively and visibly engaged with the community.[23] This includes participation in community organizations such as Chambers of Commerce, and accessibility for one-on-one meetings with key members of the community.[24] Senior managers should have measurable performance standards in the area of community relations included in their job descriptions and their performance evaluations.[25]

"Senior managers would be required to establish performance standards in the area of sustaining public trust and confidence. That activity would become part of their job descriptions, and they would be evaluated accordingly."
Trust and Confidence Report, p. 59.

"Individuals and organizations often respond better to the promise of rewards than to the threat of penalties, and they tend to produce the things for which they are being rewarded. DOE should include explicit measures of openness in performance measures for agency personnel and contractors. Provision of explicit performance measures of openness could be a useful step in establishing concrete positive incentives for openness."
National Research Council, *A Review of the Department of Energy Classification Policy and Practice,* p. 83.

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[23] The importance of broad management involvement in community relations is recognized in the private sector: "The neighbor of choice strategy needs to be a corporate-wide strategy, not a community relations strategy. While the community relations staff is instrumental and critical in planing and helping carry out the strategy, positioning the company positively in the community is a corporate-wide responsibility.". Burke, op. cit., p. 7

[24] One senior site manager reported that when he joined the Chamber of Commerce, the other members from the community were very surprised, and pleased, to see someone from the facility.

[25] The importance of evaluating managers in terms of community relations performance was heard from both DOE officials and businessmen. As one businessman put it, "In my company, when we tried to get into a community, we found individuals and made it part of their performance appraisals. " He also said it is important for facility management to get involved personally, say that community relations is important to them, and recognize people who do well in that area.

A related issue that was raised at all sites as having once been or still being a concern is the need for clear lines of accountability so that the community knows who is responsible and accountable for what goes on at the site. Sometimes it is not clear whether to turn to managers at the site, the sometimes-absentee management of the site contractor entity, the DOE Field Office, or DOE Headquarters. Confusion in the lines of authority and responsibility does not build trust and may allow staff to abdicate responsibility—a sure-fire way to engender public distrust.

Authority and responsibility for community relations should be delegated to the Field Office level to the extent possible. We heard at several sites the dissatisfaction of community members at the perception that information about important news has to be cleared with DOE Headquarters first. This situation engenders public impatience and perhaps distrust, depending on how long the delay is. The suspicion is that local staff members are not being candid or may be passing the buck to avoid admitting their own mistakes.

Concomitantly, DOE Field Office management must have the knowledge and skills needed to take a direct role in community relations and to administer the community relations aspect of the site management contract. This might require special training.[26]

Contractor personnel also play a key role in community relations, since they are usually the largest and most visible presence on the site.[27] DOE should establish performance based criteria for community relations and tie experience in community relations to site management contract awards, success in community relations to bonuses.[28] In addition, the DOE's contract with the site contractor must set meaningful standards of performance for community relations.

Direct independent assessments of the community's views of the adequacy of a site's performance in this area are preferable to self-evaluations. It is better to measure results – the actual state of community relations – than inputs (e.g., numbers of public meetings held or press releases issued). One DOE community relations manager suggested evaluating the site's performance by measuring "the temperature of the site's relations with the community," which might be accomplished by having a senior official from Headquarters meet with stakeholders.[29] The OAP feasibility study has shown that members of the community are willing and able to provide candid assessments to

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[26] "Most general managers are unprepared for taking on a community relations activity..... Some companies provide training programs, others send them to executive education programs in community relations." Burke, op. cit. pp. 9-10.

[27] "Because of the Department's extensive use of contractors in carrying out its radioactive waste management activities, any attempt to strengthen public trust and confidence will have to include those individuals in order to be successful." *Trust and Confidence* Report, p. 40

[28] The most recent RFP for the Fernald site contract included a factor for "Stakeholder Involvement Experience" – "the offeror's experience in effectively working with community groups, such as local citizens groups, local Government organizations and other interest groups." This was given 5 percent of the weight – the same as given to "Corporate Past Performance." DE-RP-00OH20115, p. 176, 179.

[29] The Trust and Confidence Task Force recommended consideration of "the deployment of 'trust and confidence' teams that would independently evaluate how different units performed." *Trust and Confidence Report,* p. 53

independent evaluators.[30]

> *To improve the quality of its interaction with all public stakeholders, the Department should:*
> - Make training in public involvement principles and processes a requirement for managers, supervisors, and technical personnel who might interact with stakeholders.
> - Make bonus awards, career advancements, and promotions dependent on successful demonstration of the capability to interact positively with a wide range of sectors in the public.
> - Require DOE contractors to conduct equivalent training for their employees. Their performance evaluations and awards should be structure to include contributions to the overall public involvement effort."
>
> *Trust and Confidence Report*, p. 50.

8. Community relations deserves its own organizational focus

Community relations should be separate from public relations in appearance and reality, and not simply a subset of public relations as is sometimes the case. [31] One stakeholder observed that each function has a legitimate but different purpose. Public relations involves informational outreach to present the facility and its activities in a positive light. Community relations involves working with the community on subjects of mutual interest and concern. While communications are important, they involve listening as well as providing information. Community relations also involves public participation, to bring the public into the planning process at an early date concerning matters that affect their interests.

Confusing public relations and community relations can cause distrust of the sincerity of community relations efforts. Community relations must never be viewed as propaganda.[32]

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[30] The Trust and Confidence Task Force concluded: "The actions [to enhance trust and confidence] endorsed by the Secretary would be incorporated into each program's strategic planning process and into its Total Quality Management regime. Appropriate metrics for evaluating performance would have to be developed in consultation with the affected stakeholders. Those 'publics' would also have to participate in the assessment process." *Trust and Confidence Report*, p. 59.

[31] The need to consider community relations as something quite distinct from traditional public relations is hardly unique to DOE. "Government relations and public relations continues to dominate the thinking behind many companies' external affairs strategies. Community relations continues to be viewed as a marginal operation." Burke, op. cit., p. 9

[32] An individual involved in cleanup issues at one site said that the site had a large public relations group, in relation to its community outreach and described the situation as "a volunteer mouse vs. a professional paid elephant."

At Fernald, the mission of the "public affairs" program is defined in a way that focuses on the community relations functions:

"Public Affairs will strive to maintain an environment where Fernald can execute its cleanup mission by:

1.) Engaging stakeholders early in the decision making process;
2.) soliciting public feedback on issues impacting cleanup and worker transition; and
3.) avoiding public outcry by being proactive and listening and watching for early indicators of public discontent.

Through various mediums, management will have the opportunity to interact directly with stakeholders to better understand their values, issues and concerns and align site activities and resources."

FY00 Mission Statement from the Annual Public Affairs Plan Fiscal Year (FY00) for FEMP.

Community relations should not be viewed as solely a function of the environmental management part of a site's organization. DOE's environmental management program has devoted considerable efforts to a wide range of activities to engage its stakeholders, so mechanisms for interactions with neighboring communities with respect to site cleanup activities are generally well-established and accepted. The sites should seek to provide community relations points of contact for all their activities, not just those conducted by the environmental management program. This is particularly important for activities that are viewed as more controversial than cleaning up the site.

A potentially complicating factor is the realignment of DOE lines of authority so that each site reports to the Headquarters office with the most direct interest in its activities. For example, Lawrence Livermore National Laboratories report to Defense Programs, Fernald to Environmental Management, and Lawrence Berkeley Laboratory to the Office of Science. The different Program Secretarial Offices can have different attitudes toward, and experience with, community relations. Secretarial attention might be required to ensure that a uniform level of attention is paid to community relations across the range of responsible Program Secretarial Offices.[33] **This objective might be achieved by**

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[33] "[T]he social vision [the philosophical underpinning for community relations activities] needs to be widely communicated throughout the company, particularly by the CEO. Only the CEO has the authority – clout, if you will—to insist upon the importance of a social vision for the success of the company. It is explaining the *need* for a social vision that is most important. If the CEO does not explain the relationship of the vision to the future of the company, and if he or she is not personally involved in community affairs, then the vision becomes a platitude." Burke, op. cit., p. 8

including the state of each facility's community relations as a standard agenda item for the Secretary's meetings with the Operations Office directors.

9. Community relations must not be a "second class citizen"

Community relations must be an integral part of all programs and activities, not simply an add-on.[34] As discussed earlier, it must be a responsibility of senior DOE and contractor management, not just the community relations organizations.

Adequate funding must be provided; community relations should be treated as a normal part of the cost of doing business, and should not be the first thing to be cut when budgets are tight. Admittedly, this can be difficult in an environment of restricted and even declining funding for mandated missions. However, the cost of bad community relations cannot be minimized. At Fernald, the settlement in the lawsuit that dealt with community pollution was $78 million. This does not include the legal fees and management time DOE devoted to avoiding the problem through using the legal process prior to settlement. DOE should weigh the cost of a litigious standoff in relation to the cost of funding community relations work. Thus, the importance of good community relations to the achievement of DOE missions should be recognized in the allocation of resources. Past reports have emphasized the need for resources to address the closely related issues of trust and confidence, and openness. [35]

Community relations expertise should be treated with same seriousness as technical and managerial expertise. Training in community relations "best practices" should be provided to staff, and when appropriate outside expertise and experience should be brought in.

An institutional focal point for community relations should be identified at Headquarters. Although responsibility and authority for community relations should be decentralized to the extent possible, a headquarters office could assist the various responsible Program Secretarial Officers carry out their responsibilities in this area, and could monitor the Department's performance in this area across the complex. It could also reduce the total costs of community relations by taking the lead in identifying and disseminating community relations "best practices" from both departmental and private sector experience.[36] The effectiveness of a site's implementation of the protocols and quality

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[34] The Trust and Confidence Task Force reached the same conclusions: "Efforts to restore and sustain public trust and confidence cannot simply be appended to on-going activities. There must be a recognition among senior policy-makers and managers that most choices have consequences for institutional trustworthiness." *Trust and Confidence Report*, p. 36.

[35] "Personnel and resources targeted toward the strengthening of public trust and confidence would be identified as part of the program's internal budget review." *Trust and Confidence Report*, p. 59."
 "Budgetary adjustments should be made in order to ensure the availability of resources for openness." *Responsible Openness*, p. 31.

[36] On this point, the Trust and Confidence Task Force recommended that to promote a new culture, the Department should "Disseminate on a systematic basis throughout DOE experientially derived "best practices" for building, sustaining, or recovering public trust and confidence." *Trust and Confidence Report*, p. 53

assurance goals for community relations should be reviewed and evaluated from Washington according to established criteria.

10. DOE facilities should seek ways to make their resources useful to the surrounding community.

A proven way for DOE facilities to improve their relationships with their host communities is to use their resources to help those communities. For example, mutual fire protection and emergency response agreements are much appreciated by surrounding communities and appear beneficial to the DOE facility as well as its neighbors. At one site, a local emergency response official said that emergency response cooperation "has helped turn around feelings against the site." He recognized that such cooperation is mutually beneficial: "They needed our manpower as much as we needed their expertise." At another site, a site official said that an automatic fire safety agreement with their neighbors is good for the morale of site's firefighters because "they like to fight fires."

Education support activities (particularly K-12) are also highly valued by host communities. At the same time, they can benefit the DOE by increasing the scientifically and technically literate talent pool and introducing them to the possibility of working with the facility as a possible career (see box).[37] At all three sites visited in this pilot study, the review team heard enthusiastic reports from local educators and others about a wide range of outreach efforts supporting local education programs.

"Strengthening the quality and practice of science, math, and engineering education in the United States is an essential priority for the nation ...... Such investment in education is a benefit not only to the nation but also to the Department itself. Given its goals, it is a significant priority for the Department to ensure that the best talent is available to sustain its ongoing mission........ The Task Force believes the Department can make an invaluable contribution to the country and ensure its own skill support by harnessing its cadre of technical people and research base to enhance science, math and technology education at the K-12 level."
Report of the SEAB Education Task Force.

While education outreach activities are popular, an effort must be made to ensure that education programs do not stray into being "public relations" efforts to promote a point of view or "convey a message." When education outreach is done by staff volunteers, even in their private capacity as parents in their own children's schools, training should

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[37] It may be as important to increase the supply of trained technicians as the supply of scientists. These trained technicians make the labs work – and they are attractive employees for other high-tech companies. Cooperative programs – especially ones that give students an opportunity to work at the site in some capacity – can increase the likelihood that they will look to the site as a possible employer when they enter the job market.

be provided to clarify the distinction between public relations and education.[38] As stated before, private businesses regularly advertise their successes through educational outreach. DOE as a government agency must use more restraint so that DOE is not perceived as using educational outreach as a tool for gaining public approval of its missions.

Sites should also consider other ways in which their physical resources and employee skill might benefit its neighbors. One businessman suggested, for example, that the site should make it possible for local businesses to purchase test and analytical services that they could not afford to do themselves. In his view, this would both benefit local businesses and provide income to the facility. Providing public meeting areas could be another contribution.

Site management should work with the community in defining the types of assistance to be provided. It is important to involve opinion leaders from the community in the early planning stages, rather than simply presenting the community with fully developed proposals. One approach, used by some private sector companies, would be to conduct periodic community needs assessments – interviews with key community leaders to learn their opinions about the needs of the community that might be addressed by community programs supported by the site. This demonstrates the site's commitment to the community, and helps ensure that its programs can be defended as responding to what the community itself identifies as critical needs. In addition, it can help avoid unreasonable expectations on the part of the community, since the site management can clearly identify the limitations on its ability to provide community support.[39] The need to include "fringe" opinions in the dialogue is essential. The danger of developing an insider group of advisors cuts off DOE's ability to respond to the dynamic quality of community change.

CONCLUSIONS

1. DOE facilities find themselves in an increasingly dynamic environment to which they must adapt. This brings the facilities into head-on competition with other, growing sectors of the economy. The DOE must not be placed at a disadvantage by neglecting constructive relations and dialog with the changing communities it finds itself in.

2. There is no "One Size fits All" recipe for community relations. Each site must tailor its approach to reconcile the nature of its mission with the makeup and interests of its own community.

3. Trust in the DOE and its predecessor agencies has been too often eroded by past actions of, and community experiences with, the DOE facilities. That makes the task difficult in many cases for current management incumbents of those facilities. This

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[38] One parent complained that a Lab volunteer in the schools used a Geiger counter to show radiation coming from a covered box. When the box was opened, a banana was inside. The parent said her child was afraid to eat bananas after viewing the demonstration.

[39] Burke, op. cit., *p. 6*

means that the facilities must strive that much harder to establish and maintain good relations with their host communities and compete with new industry which takes community relations seriously, not for altruistic reasons but in its own self interest.

4. Information given to the community must never be regarded as a smoke screen, or a sop, or a half-truth. It should be full, open, timely, and in plain English.

5. People matter. There is overwhelming evidence to suggest that it is employees as individuals that people tend to trust, not institutions.

6. Accountability to host communities has for too long been given little importance in DOE's facility management style, and in program offices at Headquarters. Lessons learned from successful community litigation at some DOE facilities must be taken to heart and applied elsewhere before other facilities have to learn the same lessons all over again the hard way.

7. Top level management cannot appear to be absentee landlords, leaving community relations to the "little people." High level participation was found not only to be appreciated by those interviewed but a key ingredient of a comprehensive community relations effort.

8. Community Relations must stand apart from Public Relations as an institutional entity. Each has a legitimate function, but very different purposes. Putting Community Relations under, or closely coupled with, Public Relations sends the wrong message, for community relations efforts must never be perceived as propaganda.

9. Community Relations must be seen by DOE management as a normal cost of doing business, and funding for it must not be "left on the beach" when funding gets tight.

10. DOE facilities are a treasure trove of talent and resources greatly valued by host communities. Otherwise critical witnesses gave the most positive testimony to the value of DOE facilities' cooperative involvement in fire protection, emergency response, and especially education in their communities.

Recommendations to the Secretary

1. The Openness Committee should conduct community relations reviews at each DOE site. Continuing the review process tested in the Pilot Study is desirable not only as a way to "take the temperature" of DOE's relations with its host communities, but also as a potentially powerful tool to assist facilities strengthen the ties with their communities, secure their trust, and in doing so permit each facility to pursue its mission in harmony with, and not antagonistic to, its surrounding community.

   The format used in the feasibility study is appropriate for the continuing reviews, except that more planning and communication both with the communities and site

personnel should precede the visit to identify non DOE/contractor employee community members, allow time for better group selection and time allocation for interviews, and provide an opportunity for interviewees to request format changes or subject inclusion.

Each review should include private feedback to the site personnel. Periodic reports would give progress reports to the Secretary on the state of community relations in the field and the effectiveness of headquarters guidance and review implementation.

2. DOE, as a department, can take the lead in community relations by institutionalizing the sharing of lessons learned by individual facilities, their successes as well as their failures. Headquarters should develop protocols for establishing quality assurance in community relations and conduct yearly audits of DOE site community relations quality assurance (QA) efforts. Protocols and QA should be implemented in every DOE program area. Contract awards and bonuses should be tied to successful implementation of community relations QA and measurable success in community relations. The measure of a site's success should not be the absence of problems, but the quality of its community dialogue once a problem arises.

3. The Secretary should require community relations reports from his site directors at the monthly director's meeting in Washington.

4. In addition to the informal envoy or staff outreach, DOE should develop community relations grievance processes to allow groups and citizens a more formal way of airing their concerns. The grievances should be reviewed and criteria should be developed for determining when grievances are serious enough to trigger program review.